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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001668

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SUBJECT: RELIGION AND SUPPORT FOR LAVALAS IN HINCHE

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 1507

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, Reasons E.O. 12958 1.4(B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Local leaders in the central plateau town of Hinche believe that Lavalas remains a dangerous political force that may win seats in upcoming Senate elections. Some of Hinche's political class fear and detest Lavalas because they were once victims of attacks by Lavalas partisans. Opposition to Lavalas in clerical circles also arises from principled opposition to overt political activity by Catholic clergy and by a perceived connection between Aristide and voodoo. At the same time, certain Hinche Catholic-peasant activists admit to a continuing personal relationship with ex-President Aristide and a readiness to work with Lavalas. End summary.

Bishop Kebreau's Struggle Against Lavalas Continues
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¶2. (C) Poloff on August 28 interviewed Bishop Louis Kebreau, the bishop of Hinche diocese, at his Hinche residence. Kebreau began by pointing to deep political fissures in Hinche. Chavanne Jean-Baptiste, the leader of the peasant self-help organization Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP), and Brother Armand Franklin, leader of an agricultural/peasant NGO called Pandiasou, compete with each other for peasant support. The bishop claimed that both groups once supported ex-President Jean Bertrand Aristide, but that only Brother Franklin does now. (Note: Jean-Baptiste acknowledged his past political relationship with Aristide in another interview. See reftel. End note.) The bishop said that Brother Franklin assumed oversight of a Port-au-Prince orphanage at Aristide's personal request, and remains a Lavalas partisan who tries to hide this affiliation.

¶3. (C) Even though Lavalas appears to have splintered into competing factions, Kebreau insists that a dangerous, pro-Aristide Lavalas is very much alive nationwide and is led by Annette Auguste (aka So Anne). He claimed that the Haitian National Police (HNP) in Port-au-Prince told him a year ago that Lavalas-affiliated bandits in Cite Soleil had a

contract to assassinate him. The Bishop was then assigned a bodyguard from UDMO (riot police, part of the Haitian National police). Kebreau opined that Lavalas considered him an obstacle, but would not elaborate further. He claimed to have been kidnapped by Lavalas partisans at some point in the past. The Bishop declared that the word "Lavalas" has a second Haitian meaning besides "flash flood", "tidal wave" or "tsunami": it is the name of a local violent voodoo spirit associated with Port Salut, a spirit with a strong affinity for human blood sacrifice. (Note: Aristide is from Port Salut, located in the southeast near Les Cayes. End note.) Kebreau implied that Lavalas adherents are motivated to violence by the voodoo loa (spirit) that they worship.

14. (C) Bishop Kebreau recalled his own long and turbulent personal relationship with Jean Bertrand Aristide. Kebreau claimed to have met the former president while Aristide was training to become a Salesian priest. Kebreau was Aristide's superior on numerous occasions. (Note: The Salesian Order is an order of Catholic priests who take vows of poverty and learn a vocational trade to help support their ministries. End note.) Kebreau claimed that he never supported Aristide politically because Salesian priests disavow political involvement. Aristide's political activity eventually got him expelled from the Salesian order. Aristide never again visited the bishop, even though Kebreau said that Aristide sought a rapprochement by offering him a gift of land, which Kebreau says he refused.

15. (C) The Bishop believes there is a strong undercurrent of support for Lavalas in Haiti that leads many to fear that upcoming senatorial elections will result in the victory of numerous Lavalas candidates. He reasoned that citizens who had voted for President Rene Preval had done so because of his previous affiliation with Lavalas and Aristide, not out of support for the president's party Lespwa. Kebreau

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expected that voters will react to Preval's tepid policies by voting in the future for the more radical Lavalas. Against the background of this threat, and due to the need for greater border security, Kebreau advocates the re-establishment of the Haitian army.

The Price for Brother Franklin's Relationship with Aristide
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16. (C) Poloff on August 29 interviewed Brother Jeff (last name unknown) at a compound just outside of Hinche belonging to "Pandiasou," a religious-based organization dedicated to supporting peasants and their way of life. Pandiasou has schools, a hospital, potable water projects, and agricultural projects in every department except the North and Northwest Departments. (Note: Pandiasou leader Brother Armand Franklin was unavailable for an interview. End note.) Brother Jeff explained that Pandiasou receives its funding from several international donors, primarily the European Union and Japan. Jeff noted that Pandiasou's demand that the government not "treat peasants as animals" has caused perennial problems with the government. Brother Jeff affirmed that the Haitian political class initially regarded Brother Armand Franklin and Pandiasou as Lavalas sympathizers. When Aristide left Haiti the first time in 1991, anti-Lavalas partisans and the army persecuted the group. When Aristide returned in 1994, Aristide came to believe that Pandiasou was anti-Aristide, so he in turn embarked on persecuting Pandiasou. Brother Jeff claimed the period immediately following Aristide's 2004 departure was the worst time for their organization, when former army members ransacked the compound and destroyed many projects.

17. (C) Brother Jeff claimed that Brother Franklin has a continuing but complicated personal and political relationship with Aristide, which began when they were teenagers in a Salesian order school. Brother Franklin opposed Aristide when he first declared his candidacy for

presidency. (Note: This would logically flow from Franklin's membership in the Salesian Order, which forbids political activity by the clergy. End note.) On the other hand, Jeff would not rule out that Franklin will work with Aristide in the future, declaring that Pandiasou wants to work with all organizations committed to helping peasants and the dispossessed in a transparent, non-political way. Brother Jeff believes that the Catholic Church views Pandiasou both as a comparative benchmark to assess its own projects, as well as a competitor. (Note: The other prominent pro-peasant organization in the Hinche area, the Peasant Movement of Papaye - MPP - headed by Chavanne Jean-Baptiste, opposes Lavalas. Formerly an Aristide supporter, Jean Baptiste later was a victim of physical attacks by Lavalas partisans, see reftel. End note)

Comment

18. (C) MPP and Pandiasou are influential NGOs that compete for the peasants' support by promoting their welfare and interests. Pandiasou has a religious component not present in MPP. The Catholic Church, although influential in the department, does not overtly court peasant support. All have a complicated history with Aristide and Lavalas that continues to resonate in Hinche. Bishop Kebreau's opposition to Aristide appears to be fundamental, based on the church's (and the Salesian Order's) opposition to overt political activity by Catholic clergy, the church's rejection of liberation theology, and Aristide's perceived embrace of voodoo. Physical attacks on the Bishop by Lavalas supporters only deepened his antagonism to Aristide and Lavalas. On the other hand, similar Lavalas attacks on Brother Franklin appear not to have terminated his relationship with Aristide. (Note: Many in Port-au-Prince believe Franklin actually supports Aristide and will use his orphanage as the basis of a movement similar to Aristide's Selavie youth group. End note.) Kebreau, Franklin and Jean-Baptiste still accept Aristide's programmatic premise that the dispossessed, whether peasant or urban, must be politically and economically empowered. The Bishop and MPP leader Jean-Baptiste, however, reject Aristide and Lavalas as

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vehicles to bring about this empowerment. Brother Franklin's residual tacit support for Lavalas, despite his personal suffering at the hands of Lavalas supporters, indicates a certain continuing reverence for the figure of Aristide. It is difficult to assess the degree to which that reverence may express itself in peasant support for Lavalas candidates in future elections.
SANDERSON